



Department of Justice

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FEDERAL IMMIGRATION INVESTIGATION LEADS TO 45 ARRESTS

TYLER, TX – United States Attorney John L. Ratcliffe announced today that federal agents with the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) initiated an enforcement operation early this morning resulting in 45 arrests at the Pilgrim's Pride poultry processing plant in Mount Pleasant, Texas.

A federal grand jury in Tyler returned multiple-defendant indictments on April 1, 2008, that remained under seal until today's operation. The indictments allege that each Defendant obtained and used the Social Security Account Numbers of others to obtain employment with Pilgrim's Pride Corporation in Titus County, Texas. Pilgrim's Pride is one of the largest poultry processing plants in the United States. Management at Pilgrim's Pride cooperated fully with today's arrests and the company has not been charged with any crimes.

As of today, 45 defendants have been arrested on charges of False Use of a Social Security Account Number. If convicted, each Defendant could receive up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of not more than \$250,000.00. After completion of criminal proceedings in these cases, including any sentences that may be imposed, defendants found to have been in the United States illegally will be returned to ICE custody and placed in deportation proceedings.

"We will continue to aggressively prosecute all persons who take someone else's good name and credit for the purpose of working illegally in this country," said John L. Ratcliffe, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Texas. "These federal indictments underscore our commitment to stop immigration fraud and identity theft in the American workplace."

This case is being investigated by the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Department of Labor, and the Social Security Administration and is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Texas, with the assistance of the Office of Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott and the Texas Department of Public Safety. Similar investigations and operations are being handled by United States Attorneys in the Eastern District of Arkansas, Eastern District of Tennessee, Middle District of Florida, and Northern District of West Virginia.

It is important to note that an indictment should not be considered as evidence of guilt and that all persons charged with a crime are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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